

John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963

Hundreds Are in Capital For 25th Remembrance

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 21 — A quarter of a century after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, hundreds of people are gathering here to honor his memory.

At noon today 500 former Peace Corps volunteers began a 24-hour vigil in the Rotunda of the Capitol, reading aloud their thoughts about the 35th President from journals and letters they wrote while abroad. At 1 o'clock Tuesday, the 25th anniversary, a commemorative service will be held at St. Matthew's Roman Catholic Cathedral, where President Kennedy's coffin rested.

For weeks, more than 150 television crews from around the world have been filming at his grave where, beginning Tuesday, an hourly round

ing through the pictures and books that my mother collected, I did not understand what he stood for, but I have since grown. What I try to understand is his personality, what he was like, how he hoped for the future of America and what he accomplished. And last, what I can do to pick up the goals and dreams he left behind."

This has been a time for a number of informal Washington gatherings of Kennedy's old colleagues and friends. At a dinner organized by Myer Feldman, his White House counsel, several dozen members of the Kennedy Cabinet and former Administration officials reminisced about the thousand days.

What His Eyes Were Saying

"Those three years were the finest of my life — the top," said Douglas Dillon, who was the Treasury Secretary.

"Jack was always rethinking something," said Charles Guggenheim, the film maker who produced the official Kennedy Library film about the President. "You could see it when someone asked him an unanswerable question. What his eyes were saying is that in many ways life is a joke, nothing is perfect, things go wrong and there is something that is ludicrous about life — especially in politics."

Several members of the 1963 White House press corps who were with the President that day in Dallas are gathering for a reunion and lunch at the Cosmos Club on Tuesday. "We have the list of people who made the trip," said Ray Scherer who covered the White House for NBC News, "and everybody we have asked has said yes."

Senator Christopher Dodd, a Connecticut Democrat, who helped build health clinics in the Dominican Republic as a Peace Corps volunteer in the mid-1960's, introduced a Congressional resolution making the Rotunda ceremony possible.

Like an Older Brother

He was joined there today by other members of Congress who were in the Peace Corps. Each read aloud for three minutes. Some read from letters written Nov. 22, 1963; some read from journals, recounting that President Kennedy sent them off as "messengers of peace" in a Rose Garden ceremony.

"I know you didn't vote for him, Dad," Warren Kinsman wrote home from Turkey on Nov. 30, 1963, "but to all of us in the Peace Corps he was like an older brother who had a vision of Americans sharing their knowl-

The Kennedy family would like the day of his birth commemorated.

of tributes and visits are scheduled. The grave is visited by four million people each year.

Memories for the World

"It didn't surprise me that Americans who visited his grave would invariably tell you in minute detail what they were doing when they first learned of his death," said Kerri Childress, who works in the office of the historian at Arlington National Cemetery. "But it has astounded me that foreign visitors, no matter where they come from — Africa, Latin America, Japan, Europe, the Soviet Union — do the same thing. They tell me exactly where they were that day."

"Five Soviet war generals recently told me how old they were when it happened, and what they were doing. I have had South Americans cry. It wasn't just an American tragedy. It affected people from all walks of life, all over the world."

The Kennedy family has expressed a preference that John F. Kennedy's life be celebrated by commemorating the day of his birth, May 29, not the day of his death. But it was his violent death that helped to shape the way his Presidency is remembered by many — buoyant, eloquent and unfulfilled.

Letters have been streaming into the office of Senator Edward M. Kennedy. A teen-age girl from Ohio wrote: "When I was very young, look-

A Presidency that was buoyant, eloquent and unfulfilled.

edge and experience with our brothers and sisters around the world."

Along with the camera crews from Tokyo, London; Vienna, Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, Rome and Cologne, there have been many American film crews at Arlington. "We've had a lot of local television people here from Arizona, Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia — you name it," said Patty Heard, a press assistant at the Military District of Washington. "They are all doing shows marking the 25th anniversary."

As for Tuesday, she said, "we have ceremonies all day long, the Green Berets, the seventh class of the motor



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Chuck Ludlam, above left, and Ed Branson chatting during a 24-hour vigil in the Capitol Rotunda marking the 25th anniversary of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The former Peace Corps volunteers served together in Nepal. At left, visitors paid their respects at President Kennedy's grave at Arlington (Va.) National Cemetery.

torpedo boat squadron, the one the President graduated with, the Old Hibernian Club and Phi Kappa Theta, Jack Kennedy's fraternity at Harvard."

At 8:15 A.M. Tuesday former members of the Kennedy White House staff will assemble for a memorial Mass at Arlington. At 9 o'clock they will place the first flowers on his grave: 46 red roses, one for each of his years.

A Green Beret for the Grave

Gen. Michael D. Healy, the last commander of Special Forces in Vietnam, will speak at a chapel service Tuesday morning at Arlington Cemetery. Later, a wreath in the form of the Green Beret will be placed on the grave. That tradition began the day of his funeral when a sergeant in charge of a detail of Special Forces men guarding the grave placed his beret on the coffin.

"It was President Kennedy who was responsible for the rebuilding of the Special Forces and giving us back our Green Beret," said Forrest Lindley, a writer for the newspaper Stars

and Stripes who served with the Green Berets in Vietnam.

"People were sneaking around wearing it when conventional forces weren't in the area and it was sort a cat and mouse game," he recalled. "When Kennedy authorized the Green Beret as a mark of distinction,

everybody had to scramble around to find berets that were really green. We were bringing them down from Canada. Some were handmade, with the dye coming out in the rain."

A week ago today at a gathering at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Senator Kennedy said the school was a living memorial to his brother. Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis and her children, Caroline and John, were all there.

"The Nov. 22 anniversary is coming up," he said, "and it's understandable that people who admired President Kennedy want to honor him then. But that date is always a sad occasion for our family. We want to remember my brother's life, not relive his death."